2013 Federal Policy Agenda

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION IN NURSING
As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is dedicated to advancing higher education within the profession. The association represents over 720 schools of nursing that educate approximately 400,000 students and employ over 16,000 faculty members. Together, these institutions produce about half of our nation’s Registered Nurses (RNs) and all of the nurse faculty and researchers. AACN’s vision for the profession is clear. By 2020, highly educated and diverse nursing professionals will lead the delivery of quality health care and the generation of new knowledge to improve health and the delivery of care services. Strong federal investments in nursing education and research will be necessary to realize this vision.

AACN views federal advocacy as having an integral role in the ability to shape, advance, and promote a professional nursing workforce that meets America’s healthcare needs. For 44 years, AACN has focused its federal policy agenda on two key components of the profession – education and research. In recent years, AACN has undertaken significant efforts to assist our practice colleagues with a number of federal initiatives that will strengthen the role of RNs and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) in quality care delivery.

Consistent with the organization’s history and present initiatives, AACN’s 2013 Federal Policy Agenda directly addresses the need to champion policies that place the patient first through care provided by an interdisciplinary team of providers, where nurses are able to practice to the full extent of their education and training. Additionally, with the release of the landmark Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) report Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, AACN closely aligned its Federal Policy Agenda items to reflect the important recommendations of the report.

The advocacy goals outlined are equally valued and represent AACN’s top federal priorities:

- Amplify nursing’s leadership role in the transformation of America’s healthcare delivery system to a model that is patient-centered and team-based, which will improve access and quality, while reducing cost.
- Advance new and existing policies that meet the call for a more highly educated and diverse nursing workforce by raising awareness to the critical importance of seamless academic progression and interprofessional education.
- Sustain federal funding to support professional nursing education and focus on the demand for nurse faculty.
- Improve the federal investment in nursing research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation.
1. **Amplify nursing’s leadership role in the transformation of America’s healthcare delivery system to a model that is patient-centered and team-based, which will improve access and quality, while reducing cost.**

The IOM report calls for nurses “to be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning healthcare in the United States.” AACN firmly agrees that the unique expertise derived from the science, skills, and philosophy of nursing will help ensure access to high quality and cost-effective care. Removing scope of practice barriers, improving quality standards, and focusing on health promotion and disease prevention are only a few of the many themes that will require insight from professional nursing during system reforms.

AACN is committed to helping create a reformed system that is patient-centered by ensuring that critical issues important to nursing education, research, and practice are addressed and that nursing’s expertise is a continued presence in future healthcare decisions.

Additionally, AACN will work with nursing experts and other coalitions to make certain the practice and leadership skills of nurses as well as APRNs are clearly recognized in current and new healthcare delivery models.
2. Advance new and existing policies that meet the call for a more highly educated and diverse nursing workforce by raising awareness to the critical importance of seamless academic progression and interprofessional education.

The IOM report states that “nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.” This objective has been the cornerstone of AACN’s advocacy for 44 years. The changing healthcare system and the demands it places on nurses to stay current on best practices renders it critical that nursing students are educated to adapt and contribute to quality health care. These vital skills are clearly linked to the competence level achieved through baccalaureate and graduate nursing education. Therefore, AACN is committed to working with those that represent associate degree nursing programs to promote seamless academic progression. These collaborations are critical to meet the goals set in the IOM Future of Nursing Report. At the same time, the interprofessional healthcare team is essential to the success of an improved healthcare system. AACN is actively engaged in coalitions to improve interprofessional education and practice, which extends to our advocacy work.

AACN is committed to raising the awareness at the federal level about the positive patient-care outcomes associated with a highly educated nursing workforce and the benefits of a truly integrated healthcare team.
3. Sustain federal funding to support professional nursing education and focus on the demand for nurse faculty.

Towards the end of the decade, federal funding for nursing education steadily improved. Increases to the Nursing Workforce Development programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act [PHSA]) demonstrated Congress’ awareness that preparing the next generation of nurses and nurse faculty is essential to meet our nation’s healthcare demands. Additionally, investments in the National Health Service Corps (Title III, PHSA), the Health Professions Programs (Title VII, PHSA), and the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN), which support RN and APRN students, must continue to grow. However, in recent years, the reality of addressing the national deficit has slowed the federal investment in these programs.

While a new model for APRN clinical training was recently enacted through the Graduate Nurse Education Demonstration, enhanced federal efforts to support APRN education must continue beyond the conclusion of this demonstration. AACN will work with national nursing and healthcare partners to demonstrate the need for consistent funding of APRN education.

Given the demand for nurses, including APRNs, and nurse faculty in a newly reformed healthcare system, AACN is committed to capitalizing on the efforts of the federal government to protect and expand funding for professional nursing education.
4. **Improve the federal investment in nursing research and elevate the role of nursing science in healthcare innovation.**

The ground-breaking research conducted at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) translates to life-saving innovations that promote the health and wellness of the public. However, a lack of funding at the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) limits vital investigation and scientific discoveries that would improve nursing care. The NINR’s budget continues to be one half of one percent of the entire NIH’s multi-billion dollar budget.

Elevating the role nursing science has in healthcare innovation is more critical than ever as the federal government is investing in patient-centered outcomes research and is searching for best practices. Federal agencies will be offering significant grants to meet the national healthcare goals of improved access, decreased cost, and enhanced quality care. In addition to NIH, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will help to advance healthcare innovations through funded research.

Therefore, AACN is committed to advancing nursing science and helping to translate its innovations into federal policy that improves the quality of patient care.

**For more information of AACN’s advocacy efforts see:**
www.aacn.nche.edu/government-affairs